

Are You My Neighbor?

Junior Asparagus is excited about his birthday party, and he and his father are discussing the guest list. When Junior does not include the new boy, Fernando, his father asks why he is not mentioned. Junior says Fernando is new, and he is “different” because he talks differently. Junior’s father then explains that this is because Fernando and his family have moved from another country.

After Junior’s father leaves the room, a space ship whisks into Junior’s bedroom and he is greeted by Bob the Tomato and Larry the Cucumber, both wearing space helmets. Bob frantically informs Junior that he is needed because of his work at Happy Tots Preschool in “aero-space technology.” They beg Junior to help save the starship, the USS Applepies, now powerless and stranded in the path of a giant meteor which is due to crash into the starship in approximately eight minutes.

All three are shrunk by the shrinker beam and they race in the spaceship to the site of the starship to meet the engineer, Scooter. Junior learns that the meteor, traveling at 5,000 miles per hour, is made of *popcorn*. Wanting to save the 364 people aboard, Junior discovers there are only two escape pods. The engineer is frustrated because the “new guys” at the control panel appear to be crazy—all they do is sing and eat! Junior meets these “new guys,” Jimmy Gourd and Jerry Gourd, who discuss how hungry they are—so hungry they could eat a bus, a space ship or even a *planet*!

Realizing that these new fellows may be able to save the day, Junior suggests they be sent in the two escape pods to meet and eat the meteor, which they do—just in the nick of time!

Upon returning to the starship, Jerry Gourd, still hungry, eats some of a table and discovers an electrical plug underneath it. When Junior Asparagus sees it, he tells Jerry to plug it in, thus restoring power to the starship. The Gourds save the day, and Scooter realizes that differences can be good. He and Junior understand that we can learn from those who are different and be friends with them, too!

Junior informs his father that he wants to include Fernando at his birthday party, even if he is different!

THEME:

We can be friends with everybody—even those who are different from us. We might even learn from them, too!

QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS:

1. Why didn’t Junior want to invite Fernando to his birthday party? [*Because he was “new” and he didn’t know him well. And, because he talked “funny.”*]
2. How did Junior’s father respond to this? [*He told Junior that he could learn from different friends and that we should try to make friends with people who are different.*]
3. Why did Bob and Larry come in their spaceship to get help from Junior? [*Because Junior had studied Aerospace Technology at Happy Tots preschool.*]
4. What was the big emergency? [*The starship, the USS Applepies was stranded and powerless, unable to move away from a fast-approaching, giant meteor.*]
5. When the three arrived at the starship, what did Scooter, the engineer, tell them? [*There were 364 people aboard, there were only two escape pods, the “new” gourds at the panel control were crazy, a large meteor was approaching at 5000 miles per hour, and the meteor was made of popcorn!*]
6. Describe Jimmy and Jerry Gourd. [*They sang all the time, they ate all the time, they were different looking, and they were friendly.*]
7. What gave Junior the idea of how to save the starship? [*The gourds said they could eat a bus, a spaceship, or a planet.*]
8. How did the gourds save the starship? [*They went in the two escape pods to the popcorn meteor and ate until it was gone!*]
9. Upon their return, how were they greeted? [*As heroes—to applause and praise.*]
10. Was the starship’s power ever restored? [*Yes. Jimmy Gourd began to eat a table, discovered a cord, and as it was plugged in, the power returned.*]
11. What did everyone learn from this adventure? [*Being different can be special. If the gourds had not been different, the starship and all the people might have been destroyed.*]
12. How did this adventure affect Junior? [*He told his father that differences can be okay and that he wanted to invite Fernando to his birthday party.*]

(See other side for suggested activities.)

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SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES:

1. Find a person in your school, church, neighborhood, ballteam, scouts, or other activity who may be different from some of your other friends. Invite him or her to play with you and your friends, or invite him or her to your home. Ask some questions to get to know this person, such as:
 - a. Who lives in your home with you?
 - b. How do you celebrate special holidays or events?
 - c. Teach me some of the words from your language. (If the person is from another country.)
 - d. Tell me about your school—how is it the same or different from mine.
 - e. What are your favorite foods, movies, television shows, games, etc.
 - f. Make up some additional questions to ask a student who is different from you.
2. Invite a person from another country to speak to one of your groups: scouts, class at school, sports, or at another activity.
 - a. Ask questions such as those suggested in activity one.
 - b. Draw pictures or make displays to share some of the things you have learned from your visitor.
3. Learn the tune for this song from the video and sing it as a class:

I Can Be Your Friend

I can be your friend,
I can be your friend.
Any day, in any weather,
We can be friends and play together.

I can be your friend,
I can be your friend.
If your hair is red or yellow,
We can have lunch—I'll share my jello.

I can be your friend,
I can be your friend.
It's okay if we are different,
We can still play 'cause
I can be your friend.

4. After reading these words of the gourds (printed on a poster or chalkboard), discuss the questions again.

Yeah, we're all pretty different—
Some are skinny,
Some are stout.
But the **inside** is the part
We're supposed to care about!

That's where we've got feelings
That are very much the same.
And so instead of "weird-o,"
I think **friend's** a better name!

5. Discuss each line of this quote from the video, asking for feedback from the children.

Have you ever seen
a boy with funny clothes?
A girl with braces on her teeth
or freckles on her nose?
Some kids call 'em odd balls
Some kids call 'em weird...

What we need to realize is...
Calling people names because
they're different is wrong...
Instead, we need to look on them
in love and sing this song...
(See song "I Can Be Your Friend.")

6. Write a story about how a person different from you could be your friend. Use your imagination.
7. Do a puppet show with different kinds of puppets. Allow the children to share what the puppet likes, and things the children like. Tell the class, "We are alike because we both like _____. We are different because I like _____ and my puppet buddy likes _____. But, we can help each other do the things we do best."
8. Present your pictures, displays, and puppet shows to another classroom.
9. Write up what you have learned about differences in people and cultures and send it to your local newspapers. "Cranky" is a perfect name for the Grapes of Wrath.

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